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FM AMEMBASSY JAKARTA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 8000
INFO RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 4724
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 2005
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 1584
RUEHPB/AMEMBASSY PORT MORESBY 3667
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 1522
RUEHPT/AMCONSUL PERTH 0571
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RHHJJPI/USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KIRF](#) [SOCI](#) [LOVE](#) [ID](#)

SUBJECT: THERE WILL BE NO VALENTINE'S DAY IN BUKITTINGGI

1. (U) This message was coordinated with Consulate Medan.

2. (U) SUMMARY: A controversy has erupted over Valentine's Day in West Sumatra. The Mayor of Bukittinggi--the second-largest city in the province--has banned Valentine's Day celebrations, asserting they are "immoral." The Governor of West Sumatra--taking a firm stand for romance--countered the ban, however, telling the press that there would be no interference with celebrations of the holiday. The Mayor's attitude is not widely shared in Indonesia--where many non-Islamic and non-indigenous holidays are celebrated openly. END SUMMARY.

3. (U) DOWN WITH LOVE: Valentine's Day has taken a hit in West Sumatra. The Mayor of Bukittinggi, a city of 100,000 known for volcanic mountain views and located in the heart of the matriarchal Minangkabau region, has declared that Valentine's Day celebrations should be banned because they are not in line with local culture or Islam.

4. (U) According to press reports, a number of government permits already issued for Valentine's Day activities have been revoked by City Hall. The same reports said the Mayor intended to use existing regulations on "immoral act eradication" to prosecute enterprises and anyone else that celebrated the day. The Mayor also was quoted as stating that 100 additional "public order security officers" would monitor hotels, cafes and restaurants for "illicit behavior." Swinging for the fences, the Mayor also came out against New Year's Eve celebrations.

5. (U) The controversy over Valentine's Day in Sumatra is not wholly new; it has flared a bit in the past, but is more intense in Bukittinggi this year. Traditionally, the holiday has been celebrated at many retail locations in the area--much as it is in urban centers across Indonesia, including Jakarta. In Bukittinggi, the recent exposure of what the press reported as "pornographic images" of teenagers circulated on cell phones triggered the outcry, according to one contact. Sofyan Karim, former regional chief of Muhammadiyah (a well-known national Muslim organization) in West Sumatra, told Pol FSN that the city's ban was "not against Valentine's Day but opposed to the behavior of some teenagers at Valentine's Day events, including kissing and drinking alcohol."

¶6. (U) CUPID'S COMEBACK: West Sumatra Governor Gumawan publicly waded into the Valentine's debate to present a moderate view. He told the press that no one should have problems with Valentine's Day because Muslims always show affection to everyone. He specifically stated that his government would not ban Valentine's Day events and would make no effort to monitor or otherwise interfere with them.

¶7. (U) He also made a point of saying that the provincial ulamas (Islamic clerics) council did not officially declare Valentine's Day as "haram" (heretical), as was reported by the press. In Jakarta, Ma'aruf Amin, head of the MUI fatwa committee, confirmed to us that in fact there was no specific MUI edict against Valentine's Day. Amin, however, condemned the use of alcohol and other "immoral behaviors" that he said often accompanied Valentine's Day celebrations.

¶8. (U) ROSES STILL WELCOME: Valentine's Day seems safe in most of Indonesia. And, based on what we picked up, Valentine's Day celebrations are even taking place in Bukittinggi despite the municipal warnings. Nonetheless, sadly, the outcry reportedly put a damper on celebrations there. In terms of the larger picture, Indonesians sometimes face differences between government leaders influenced by conservative versus moderate religious perspectives--and this type of societal debate bubbles up now-and-then.

HEFFERN